



# Chairman's Blog

January 2024



Helen Jones

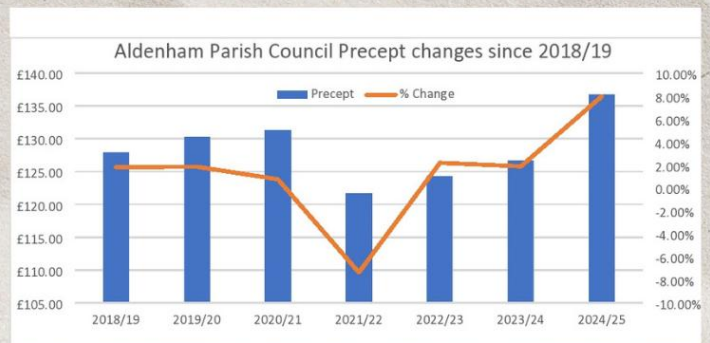
Happy New Year to you all. The big piece of work that the Council has been working on this month is the budget for 2024/25. This is something that we consider very carefully to ensure Aldenhams Parish Council is delivering its usual excellent service for the best value.

In 2020, at the height of Covid and when things looked very uncertain, Aldenhams Parish Council (APC) took a radical look at our budget and the precept request we make to Hertsmeire Borough Council (HBC), who collect it on our behalf. We slashed the 2021/22 budget by £49,679 and reduced the precept by 7.35%. We were able to do this thanks to many years of careful financial decisions that had allowed us to create reserves that could offset these costs. Whilst keeping a careful look at our reserves the Council was able to make similar decisions for 2022/23 and 2023/24, putting up the budget by the smallest amount possible.

This is unfortunately no longer sustainable. Two big planning development fights which resulted in APC being acknowledged as 'Rule 6' parties at planning appeals, against the Solar Farm and the land on Shenley Hill, have reduced the Council's reserves by £160,000. APC felt these were important battles to fight, as voiced by the thousands of objections each received. The Green Belt surrounding our villages is too precious not to fight to protect, and once gone is lost forever.

However, this has inevitably come at a cost. The Council's reserves now stand at a worryingly low level, just adequate to run the council's day-to-day operations for three months. Our operations see APC acts as caretaker for 165 acres of land, manage over 1500 trees, maintain and improve two parks as well as multiple woods and open spaces across the parish. APC has moreover for many years organised free events for children at Phillimore Recreation Ground, the Winter Fair at the Radlett Centre, the Remembrance Day safety provisions, as well as hosting one off events such as the Jubilee and the Coronation. The Council also provides the winter lights each year, and subsidise the Radlett Centre £120,000 annually to ensure the survival of this excellent local resource.

To allow APC to rebuild up the necessary reserves that have allowed it to deal with contingencies and speculative planning applications, while also continuing its day-to-day operations, a raise in our precept is unavoidable. APC has done all that it can to keep this as low as possible. APC will be proposing to raise the precept by 7.98%, an additional £10 per household per year. This raise takes it just above the 2020/21 precept, as this graph shows:



In other news, we are delighted to announce that the playground refurbishments at Phillimore Recreation Ground have been completed, despite some unfortunate delays caused by the very wet and cold weather. We have been informed that the planning appeal for Shenley Hill has been dismissed. We are delighted that the Inspector agreed with APC and Hertsmeire Borough Council that it was inappropriate development on the Green Belt and there was no justification to allow the application.

